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ABSTRACT

A major reason for social promotion has been to avoid feelings of failure on the part of the student who has been failed in the past. Failure to achieve academically has meant that the involved student repeats a grade. Feelings of failure make for an inadequate self-concept and might well involve future failure in life. This paper examines which plans might be followed to avoid or minimize social promotion in the different grade levels of public schools. Several types of extra assistance in the classroom are discussed, including additional help from the classroom teacher, after school instruction, holding students back for another year, and utilizing Multiple Intelligences theory and Learning Styles theory in student assessment. Issues related to using student scores on standardized tests and other approaches that place pressure on teachers to have students achieve at a higher rate are discussed. (MKA)

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Assessment of Plans for Eliminating Social Promotion (Implications for Counseling and Guidance)

by
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ASSESSMENT OF PLANS FOR ELIMINATING SOCIAL PROMOTION

(Implications for Counseling and Guidance)

Evaluation of plans to eliminate social promotion in the different states of the union are in vogue or in the offing. Plans have considerable agreements and yet there are differences in emphases. Social promotion has long been looked on as an evil. It is based on the idea that a student be promoted to the next grade level regardless of academic achievement. A major reason for social promotion has been to keep learners of a similar age level together to avoid feelings of failure on the part of the student who has been failed in the past. Failure to achieve well academically has meant that the involved student repeats a grade. Feelings of failure make for an inadequate self concept and might well involve future failure in life. Which plans might be followed to avoid or minimize social promotion in the different grade levels of the public schools? (See Ediger, 2000, 244-249).

Providing Students with Extra Assistance in the Classroom

Those students not meeting grade level expectations may receive additional help during the regular school day in order to achieve more optimally. Teacher observation, using appropriate standards, may be used to address the needs of possible social promotion students. However, documentation of these needs is generally advocated. Thus, a reputable diagnostic standardized or a state developed criterion referenced test (CRT) may be used for diagnosis and remediation of deficiencies. These tests need to follow recommended criteria for validity and reliability.

Based on test results, assistance needs to be provided to the student identified as deficient in academic skills. The deficiencies need to be overcome so that promotion to the next grade level is possible and social promotion avoided.

Disadvantages of using in school approaches during the regular school day to assist those who need extra help to avoid social promotion include answers to the following questions:

1. will the regular teacher have too many students in the classroom who need extra assistance to avoid failure?
2. how accurately can grade level standards be defined when saying that each student needs to achieve <u>at</u> grade level? This is a question which needs to be answered when states develop high standards for student achievement.
3. how high can any one student achieve in the high standards movement? There are questions here pertaining to the objectivity or arbitrariness of these standards.

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4. should the teacher rather attempt to ascertain where each learner is presently in achievement and then attempt to provide for continual optimal progress for each?

5. will the teacher need to provide too much time in assisting at risk students and thus neglect the others in teaching and learning situations? (See Ediger, 2000, 173-178).

A second approach advocated in helping to avoid social promotion is to provide after school instruction. Those identified as being deficient in achievement might then be taught after the school day has ended. Many problems accrue here, including the following:

1. will teachers be compensated for these after school programs?
2. who will be hired for after school instruction if the regular classroom teacher is not involved? Qualified teachers are needed for each set of students taught. Where will these teachers come from?
3. will the school day become excessively long with after school instruction? Physiological, social, and emotional needs of students must also be met.
4. what kind of transportation will be provided for those who participate in after school instruction and are bused?
5. who will be held accountable for the success or lack thereof of those students involved in after school instruction? (See Ediger, 1999, 233-240).

A third approach may be to hold students back for another year on the same grade level. Repeating a grade has rarely shown to help any single student. There are a few exceptions such as if the involved student and parents agree to the repeating of a grade. However, if students do not achieve up to grade level, and iron clad rules may be made to hold these students back on the same grade level with the hope that grade level achievement will be in the offing. Questions and problems which may arise due to holding students back are the following:

1. will there be a large back log of failed students?
2. what does failure do to the self concept of the individual student?
3. what does the future hold for those students who do not pass a state mandated exit test? The future does look bleak for these students. There are states which permit students to retake the exit exams three times or until they are passed. It must be a strange feeling to take an exit test over again until it is passed.
4. might a student ultimately take the GED test in order to receive an equivalent high school diploma?
5. are these high stakes tests adequately accurate to predict success in academic achievement and success at the work place? (See

Ediger, 2000-2001, 18-20).

Using Multiple Intelligences Theory in Assessment

Paper pencil tests using multiple choice test items developed by standardized testing companies or on the state level pertain to a student using one form of intelligence, such as verbal/linguistic. Gardner (1993) emphasizes using Multiple Intelligences Theory whereby a student may use the intelligence possessed to reveal what has been learned. Thus, in addition to verbal/linguistic intelligence, the student has the following additional ones to use to indicate achievement:

1. visual/space, such as in art products to reveal that which has been achieved in any curriculum area.
2. logical/mathematical involving logic in reasoning and mathematical knowledge (See Ediger, 2000, Chapter Six).
3. musical/rhythmic. Many curriculum areas provide opportunities to show what has been learned through music and/or dance in its diverse manifestations. Thus, for example, there are songs written in different historical periods of time which reveal subject matter in the lyrics as well as in rhythms such as folk dances in place (geography).
4. intrapersonal in which a student reveals what has been learned on an individual basis.
5. interpersonal includes those learners who best indicate learnings through a cooperative endeavor.
6. bodily/kinesthetic includes those activities involving athletic and physical prowess.Thus, in a study of history, a student may reveal achievement through showing games which were played in earlier period of time.
7. scientific. There are students who are strong in being objective thinkers about subject matter learned. They tend to leave out biases, prejudices, and dogmas from their trend of scientific thought. The academic discipline of science, too, is liked by many students and achievement here will be developmentally high .

Learning Styles Theory Considerations in Assessment

Searson and Dunn (2001) have done considerable research on the effectiveness of implementing learning styles theory into teaching and learning situations. According to their research, by implementing these theoretical ideas in the classroom, students tend to achieve more optimally in teaching and learning. Several key ideas and elements here which need to be followed include:

1. environmental factors such as the amount of light intensity, sound or noise acceptable by the student, as well as temperature readings preferred; formal versus informal seating of learners is also a

factor.

2. emotional elements include student motivation persistence, responsibility, conformity versus nonconformity, and preferences for structure versus choices in what to learn.

3. sociological factors include student preferences for learning alone as compared to studying with peers, and with a collegial or more authoritarian teacher.

4. physiological elements include perceptual strengths such as auditory, visual, tactual, and/or kinesthetic skills as ways of learning as well as intake needs such as snacking (eating) and mobility (movement) during studying.

5. psychological elements which describes how students process information including analytic learners who focus on facts or detail in a step by step fashion. Gradually facts buildup to an understanding. Conversely, global students desire to understand how what is learned relates to them and their lives before focusing on facts. Also analytic students respond to printed words and numbers whereas global students respond better to illustrations and pictures.

According to learning styles theory, the amount of achievement of any one learner will depend upon how well the above named learning styles are followed. Thus, for emotional factors, the degree of student motivation, persistence, and preference for learner choice versus a teacher determined structure in what is learned will make for more optimal achievement. Highly motivated students will achieve more than the less motivated as will the persistent learner attain more than the non-persistent person. Selected students desire to have a plethora of chances to make choices in terms of what is to be learned whereas others will desire for the teacher to make these decisions as to what to learn. Following learning styles theory then might make it possible for more students to pass exit tests for graduation. A five point Likert Scale may assess teachers if they are using learning styles theory of instruction. Each item needs to be clearly written so that assessors possess clarity on criteria being used for the assessment program.

Using Student Test Results to Eliminate Social Promotion

State mandated test results from students may be used to encourage teachers to emphasize the academics in the curriculum. There could be penalties for teachers if students do not achieve a certain cut off score in the basics when "separating the sheep from the goats." The penalty may involve no salary raises for the teacher or even a reduction in pay. Or, merit pay can be given to successful teachers when students have appropriate state mandated test scores. The reasoning here could be carried to an extreme with a strict pay for student

performance policy. No longer would teachers then be compensated based on level of university degree programs completed, nor on the number of years of teaching experience. There are a number of cautions which need to be followed here, including the following:

1. students in higher socioeconomic levels always average much higher test scores as compared to those in the lower economic arena, according to research results.
2. gaps in achievement between the dominant group in society as compared to minorities has always been great due to the latter not having had the educational opportunities as compared to the former. "Closing the gap" has been a slogan in society for some time.
3. mentally retarded and marginally retarded students are to be counted in with those taking the state mandated tests. This will lower averages of state mandated test scores (See Education Week, January 31, 2001).

There have been numerous additional approaches which have been used or advocated to place pressure on teachers to have students achieve at a higher rate of accomplishment. These include

1. bankruptcy laws whereby the state takes over administering and supervising a school or school district if student achievement is determined to be lacking therein.
2. vouchers given to students in failing schools and each voucher may be redeemed in receiving schools deemed to be successful in teaching and learning situations.
3. open enrollment in which a student may choose to enroll in any district in a state. The market place economy philosophy is stressed here in the educational arena.
4. performance contracting in which the local school district contracts with a commercial business firm, such as Channel One, to provide schooling/education to students. The business firm then trains teachers to use a selected approach or approaches in teaching students.
5. report cards which publish in the media how one school or school system compares with others in the state on mandated test results. Low scoring schools may then feel pressure to measure up.

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